United Nations S/2016/968

Security Council

Distr.: General
15 November 2016

Original: English

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. The Security Council, in its resolution 2239 (2015), affirmed its intention to consider the possible withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and transition to a future United Nations presence that would support the Government of Liberia in consolidating peace, based on the Council's review of Liberia's overall capacity to ensure stability and security conditions on the ground, and, in that regard, requested me to conduct an assessment mission to Liberia in order to provide recommendations. That request was reiterated in resolution 2308 (2016), in which the Council extended the mandate of UNMIL until 31 December 2016 and requested me to include an update on the modalities for transferring to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) pursuant to resolution 2295 (2016) the quick reaction force established within the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) pursuant to resolution 2162 (2014). In accordance with those resolutions, a strategic assessment mission visited Liberia to assess the situation on the ground and consult with national and other stakeholders. The present report contains the findings of that assessment and my recommendations on the future of UNMIL.

II. Strategic assessment

2. The strategic assessment mission conducted its field visit from 29 August to 8 September 2016. It was led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and comprised representatives from the Department of Field Support, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Safety and Security, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), UNOCI and UNMIL, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund, representing, respectively, United Nations development and humanitarian agencies, funds and programmes.

3. The assessment team met with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and members of her Cabinet; the leadership of the Senate and the House of Representatives; the Chief Justice and other Supreme Court

Please recycle

justices; senior security officials, including the leadership of the army, police, immigration and corrections services; the national commissions responsible for elections, governance, human rights, law reform, small arms and anti-corruption; integrity institutions; the land task force; political parties; civil society, including women's groups, traditional chiefs and elders, religious leaders, and media managers; representatives of the diplomatic and donor community; the United Nations country team; and UNMIL. The team also visited Bong and Grand Gedeh counties.

A. Findings of the strategic assessment

4. A comprehensive assessment of Liberia must be placed in its historical context, including the legacy of more than a century and a half of constitutionally enshrined exclusion of the vast majority of the population, a quarter of a century of political crisis and 14 years of successive, brutal civil wars that devastated the people of Liberia and destabilized the region. The Liberia to which UNMIL was deployed in October 2003 was a completely failed State in which three warring factions controlled sections of Monrovia and the interior; the public sector had collapsed; the infrastructure lay in ruins; the national police and army had disintegrated into various factions; what remained of the security sector was dominated by a proliferation of agencies created by successive regimes to persecute political opponents and repress citizens; the justice sector had disintegrated; more than a third of the population was displaced; and criminal economic exchange, dominated by the illegal exploitation of natural resources, was thriving.

5. In that context, persisting challenges, including with respect to the security and rule of law sectors, governance and national reconciliation, have been linked to structural issues that predate the conflict, specifically a State designed to serve a minority settler population based in Monrovia. These challenges have been compounded by the continued effects of the 2014 outbreak of the Ebola virus disease, which constrained the limited fiscal space, depriving the Government of resources to pursue its transformation agenda. Consolidating the hard-won peace, therefore, requires sustained, long-term efforts to build institutions that are inclusive, free of corruption and able to provide opportunities for, and services to, all citizens.

6. The present assessment also took into account previous efforts to define an exit strategy for UNMIL, specifically, the 2012 assessment recommending a gradual drawdown of the Mission through mid-2015 commensurate with the development of national security capacity (S/2012/230), as well as the 2014 strategic review that recommended concluding the security transition by mid-2016 (S/2014/598).

Political environment

7. All interlocutors underscored the significance of the October 2017 elections and the democratic transition that will follow in January 2018, which will be the first handover of presidential power following an inclusive and competitive election since Liberia's establishment as a republic in 1847. Given that the President appoints nearly all public officials in the country, it will be seen as a "winner-takes-all" contest and it could be highly contentious, as was the case in 2005 and 2011.

There is no clear front-runner to succeed President Johnson Sirleaf, who is supporting the candidature of her Vice President, Joseph Boakai. Additionally, all 73 seats in the House of Representatives will be contested in October 2017. Given that only one electoral round is required for legislative elections, some seats may be decided with slim margins, raising prospects for numerous election-related disputes. A year before the elections, 22 political parties have registered with the National Elections Commission and the political environment is dynamic, with party alliances forming and splintering on the basis of personalities and expediency rather than ideology.

8. The National Elections Commission conveyed to the assessment mission confidence about its readiness to organize and conduct the elections with limited international assistance. However, the Commission faces challenges, including the Government's inability to disburse adequate funding in a timely manner; logistical shortcomings; limited capacity to adjudicate election-related disputes; and persistent questions from some stakeholders about its impartiality. International partners informed the assessment mission that the 2017 elections can and should be a fully nationally owned process, pointing to the capacity the Commission demonstrated by conducting elections in 2011 and 2014 with limited international support. However, those partners also expressed regret that political decisions were taken that undermine the ability of the Government to meet its financial obligations for the electoral process, including the non-inclusion of tax increases on luxury goods in the budget for 2016/17, which could affect the partners' willingness to fill a funding gap estimated at $25 million. In October 2016, the President approved a national budget of $600 million, allocating $20 million for the elections.

9. UNDP is providing technical support for the elections, in accordance with the recommendations in my August 2014 report (S/2014/598), which followed the National Elections Commission's request for support. In a letter to UNMIL dated 15 September 2016, the Chairman of the Commission called for specific assistance, primarily logistics, which falls broadly within the parameters of electoral assistance for the period from 2015 to 2018 that were approved by my focal point for electoral assistance activities following the 2014 needs assessment mission; it therefore may be addressed in the context of the ongoing UNDP electoral assistance project, resources permitting.

10. Legal provisions that are inconsistent with Liberia's obligations to protect civil and political rights remain in place, however, and have been used to curtail fundamental freedoms. In recent months, the Government has closed or suspended two opposition and independent media outlets, ostensibly for failing to comply with tax and licensing regulations. Members of the political opposition and civil society denounced these actions as an attempt to silence dissenting voices and an independent press, with a view to influencing the elections.

11. Though the President has articulated an ambitious reform agenda, many reforms have yet to show an impact. Greater political will is required to expand democratic space and enhance citizen engagement and to address corruption at all levels of government and society. Impunity for shortcomings in governance has contributed to cynicism, with many interlocutors expressing regret that a narrow elite is benefiting from corruption, nepotism and cronyism, while the vast majority

has given up on promised peace dividends of basic services, improved livelihoods and a transformed Liberia.

12. Several reforms are pending legislative action, including on domestic violence, land rights, local governance, and equitable participation and representation. Members of the legislative leadership with whom the assessment mission met have committed to expediting the passage of priority legislation. Subsequently, the legislature has adopted the land authority bill and ratified 32 protocols of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

13. As found in previous assessments, the root causes of Liberia's conflict remain unaddressed in the absence of meaningful national reconciliation, accountability for human rights violations and abuses, or efforts to develop a shared sense of nation among all Liberians. This has undermined progress in taking forward critical reforms that would broaden political space, develop the security sector and improve governance and rule of law. Many interlocutors expressed the view that, notwithstanding the passage of important legislation during the 11 years under the present Administration, implementation has been slow. As a consequence, many feel marginalized. Members of civil society pointed to poor state-society relations as a risk to sustaining peace, saying that most members of the population believe the Government is unaccountable to them.

14. Relations between the executive branch of the Government and segments of civil society appear to have improved since the strategic review in 2014. However, it was apparent from all interlocutors that efforts by the Government to communicate with or fully engage the people of Liberia have been inadequate, particularly with respect to seeking their input on reform processes or empowering them as citizens. Moreover, despite the creation of several institutions focused on transparency and oversight, the public lacks confidence that the Government is committed to addressing corruption. Several interlocutors expressed the view that the international community should do more to encourage the present Administration to deliver on its promises, including by empowering national institutions to carry out their mandates. In that regard, they called on the United Nations to undertake a serious introspection about its past mistakes in Liberia, with a view to proceeding in the future on the basis of mutual accountability between the Government and the international community.

15. Most interlocutors pointed to an absence of political will as the reason why national reconciliation has stalled. Members of civil society informed the assessment mission that they were unaware of any progress made since the elaboration of a reconciliation road map in 2012. It was observed that, to be effective, reconciliation must be a comprehensive process guided by vision, taking into account aspects such as dialogue, community empowerment and accountability at the appropriate time. Interlocutors also pointed to the actions of the international community as contributing to lost momentum, vision and cohesion, starting with the determination, following the publication of the 2009 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that national reconciliation is a "Liberian problem" and subsequently reducing the highly political process to a series of projects.

Human rights situation

16. Improvements with respect to human rights include the establishment of a national commission to promote and protect human rights; increased oversight by civil society; and the adoption of important legislation, including legislation criminalizing rape. Remaining shortcomings involving human rights are a risk to sustained stability, in a context of limited political will to take forward national reconciliation and essential reforms, and with security agencies that have yet to earn the trust of the population.

17. There remains almost total impunity for past and present human rights violations and abuses, particularly for sexual and gender-based violence including rape, due to factors such as limited capacity to administer justice, inadequate procedural laws, corruption and a lack of political will to hold perpetrators accountable. In the 1,511 rape cases registered in 2014 and 2015, less than 4 per cent of the alleged perpetrators were convicted; the trend has not improved in 2016. Many alleged perpetrators, even if arrested, are not held accountable under the law because of compromises within communities and families, inadequate investigations, corruption, and weak security and justice sector oversight and accountability mechanisms.

18. Deeply entrenched harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, forcible initiation into secret societies, trial by ordeal and ritualistic killing, which disproportionally affect the most vulnerable, including women and children, have had a negative impact on human rights. Perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. During the 2015 universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council, the Government committed to criminalizing female genital mutilation. However, the pending domestic violence legislation only provides for partial criminalization.

19. The mandate of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, established in 2010, includes receiving complaints, monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, proposing policy and legislation, promoting human rights education and implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the National Commission faces institutional, operational and governance challenges, including limited field presence and poor management of its annual budget of less than $1.2 million, which constrain its ability to perform its statutory oversight role and to undertake monitoring, public reporting and advocacy on human rights issues. Newly appointed commissioners assumed office in May 2016, which should give new impetus to the work of the National Commission.

20. While civil society continues to increase its activism, many organizations have limited capacity to monitor and report on human rights violations or to undertake advocacy. Many organizations are concentrated in Monrovia and some are reluctant to engage with sensitive issues such as impunity and harmful traditional practices. A forum bringing together human rights actors could help enhance coordination and information-sharing.

21. The Government has adopted human rights policies and plans and included human rights in its development strategy. However, more efforts are required for the implementation of those policies and plans, as well as for international

commitments and reporting thereon. Liberia has ratified several international human rights treaties, is party to seven core human rights instruments, participates in the universal periodic review process and has extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council.

Security situation

22. The security situation has remained stable since the completion of the handover of UNMIL security responsibilities to Liberian authorities on 30 June 2016. There has not been any incident requiring the armed intervention of UNMIL in 2016.

23. Liberia has not faced a military threat for several years. However, risks are posed by civil unrest and mob violence, which ignite quickly and could escalate beyond the response capability of national security institutions, particularly if there are simultaneous incidents. Latent threats could exacerbate those risks, many of which led to the civil war, including ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, economic inequality, and competition over natural resources, particularly in concession areas. Violent crime, unregulated small arms, and cross-border trafficking in drugs, persons and weapons also present risks. Notwithstanding the assessment by the Liberia National Police of a low-to-medium risk of election-related violence, several interlocutors expressed concern about the large population of unemployed, unskilled youth who have nothing to lose by displaying antisocial behaviour and are vulnerable to manipulation by potential spoilers during the electoral period.

Capacity of national institutions to maintain stability

24. All interlocutors identified resource constraints as the biggest challenge facing the national security services; as a consequence, there are insufficient personnel, logistics and transport for timely response to security incidents, particularly in remote areas. Nearly 90 per cent of allocations for the security agencies are for salaries and recurrent costs, leaving little for operational and development-related expenditure or for reaching personnel targets. According to an adviser of the President, Liberian security agencies have achieved 70 per cent operational effectiveness, the gap of 30 per cent being attributable to the need for logistics and continued training.

25. Security sector governance based on civilian oversight and human security has improved. A national security strategy developed in 2008 is under review. The legal framework for the security sector is being established, including the enactment of legislation on the control of firearms and ammunition. On 4 October 2016, the President approved legislation for the police and immigration services that provides for the establishment of civilian complaint and policy management boards and other oversight and accountability mechanisms. There have also been advances in decentralizing services, including the deployment of security personnel outside of Monrovia and the establishment of county and district security councils. Ninety-five per cent of weapons held by security personnel have been marked and registered by the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms. Implementing the legislative framework and continuing to develop the security services will require more

investment; allocations for all agencies marginally increased in the budget for 2016/17.

26. The lack of sustained effort to instil a culture of accountability, respect for the rule of law, and human rights has had a negative impact on progress in a number of areas, including with respect to addressing systemic weaknesses in the security, justice and corrections sectors. This has had an impact on the ability of national institutions to protect the population and maintain stability, which requires that the entire criminal justice chain operate effectively, in a coordinated manner and in accordance with international human rights standards. Triggers of public disorder include resentment linked to shortcomings in governance, including perceptions about pervasive corruption, while limited access to justice undermines gains by the security sector. Members of civil society expressed regret about the slow progression of legislation aimed at enhancing civilian oversight of the security sector and allowing for more holistic coordination, noting that existing oversight and accountability mechanisms are inadequate to address human rights violations, as well as violations involving lack of discipline, committed by security personnel, though some have faced criminal charges for alleged indiscipline.

27. At the same time, many interlocutors noted that lack of confidence and poor perceptions were attributable, to some extent, to a lack of public awareness about the considerable advances achieved by security actors.

Armed Forces of Liberia

28. The Armed Forces of Liberia, which comprises 2,236 personnel, 4 per cent of whom are women, has primary responsibility for defending the country against external aggression and insurgency. There are constitutional limits on its role in internal security set out in article 85 of the Constitution and the 2008 National Defense Act of Liberia.

29. In August 2016, the United States of America concluded its training and mentoring programme for the Armed Forces of Liberia, considering the task of creating a professional and credible army to have been successfully completed. The United States still provides support for strengthening defence institutions, professional development, maritime security, engineering support and medical readiness. ECOWAS is also mentoring the Armed Forces of Liberia. The army is well trained and equipped, but lacks experience, having been newly established in 2006. Negative perceptions remain, although the army comprises mostly new recruits who were vetted by the United States and are not associated with the Armed Forces of Liberia that was a party to the civil war. The army has taken steps to ensure that it represents the entire country and to demonstrate that it is a "force for good".

30. The army faces operational challenges due to insufficient funding, which hampers its ability to deploy quickly or sustain operations outside of Monrovia. Notwithstanding those challenges, the army continues to engage in joint training and exercises with the Liberia National Police and other security agencies.

31. The coastguard has 50 personnel and the capacity to patrol up to 150 nautical miles from Monrovia. It has a limited operational role because it lacks personnel.

32. In both the army and the coastguard, attrition is high and discipline has been an issue. Development is constrained by limited opportunities and resources to conduct the exercises required to sustain training and develop skills.

Liberia National Police

33. The Liberia National Police continue to develop and decentralize. It currently comprises 5,101 personnel, including 950 females; it has a target of 8,000 personnel. Twenty-four per cent of police officers are deployed outside of Monrovia, and professional standards personnel are based in each of the five regions. The police service includes a partially armed Police Support Unit, comprised of 1,548 officers, 408 of whom are deployed outside of Monrovia, as well as a fully armed Emergency Response Unit, comprised of 371 officers, 53 of whom are assigned outside of Monrovia. The United States and UNMIL are the primary partners of these specialized units.

34. In the budget for 2015/16, $14.2 million covered salaries and $1.7 million covered operations. As a consequence, the national police lack sufficient mobility, communications, uniforms, computers and generators, which undermines operational performance. The late or partial payment of salaries also has had a destabilizing effect. However, the police have demonstrated improved planning and implementation of crowd control and public order management at public events, though there is inconsistency in practical application.

35. The police training academy provides recruit and in-service training. Due to budgetary constraints and a change in recruitment policy, priority is being given to enhancing the capacity of existing officers, rather than training additional officers. The assessment team was informed by the then-Inspector General of a need for training in human rights and for developing capacities in specialized areas, particularly forensics and pathology.

36. Efforts are under way to enhance engagement between communities and the police, including by building partnerships with community leaders and civil society. The Liberia National Police have elaborated a policy and a plan to enhance community policing, and efforts are under way to integrate these into ongoing activities, in order to build trust and confidence. The UNMIL budget for 2016/17 includes a project that will support the expansion of community policing.

Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization

37. The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization manages and controls borders and enforces the Aliens and Nationality Law. It comprises 2,596 personnel, including 751 women. Thirty per cent of the Bureau's commanders are women, and its Commissioner informed the assessment mission of efforts to achieve gender parity at all levels. With strong leadership, the Bureau has advanced internal reforms and decentralization of services, despite lacking sufficient mobility, communication and infrastructure to sustain deployments at border posts. Though the Bureau is a source of revenue for the Government, its allocations and salary scale are not on a par with those of other security agencies.

38. An immigration training academy that is being constructed in Foya, in Lofa County, will have a capacity to train 1,000 officers per year if it receives the

required funding. UNMIL continues to provide high-level advice, mentoring and support activities for the Bureau, primarily through immigration officers from various African countries, and the Commissioner has welcomed that as a constructive approach that should be regarded as good practice.

39. The Bureau engages effectively with other security services, particularly the Liberia National Police, and also works closely with local communities. Inter-agency cooperation, community engagement and early warning systems have been strengthened through joint border security and confidence-building units, security councils at the county and district levels and community watch forums, as well as through sensitization and outreach programmes.

Justice and corrections

40. Some progress has been made in rebuilding the justice system, which disintegrated during the civil war. There are magisterial and circuit courts in all 15 counties of Liberia, processes for vetting and training judges and systems for tracking cases and disseminating laws. The legal framework governing the justice system has been improved, including by the adoption of laws to expand the jurisdiction of magisterial courts, reduce case backlogs, define court fees and fines and redefine rape. However, there is a need to update many laws and to ensure that judicial personnel have access to those laws. Access to justice remains extremely limited, particularly outside of Monrovia, notwithstanding the establishment of three justice and security hubs. Only two prosecutors and two public defenders have been appointed to each circuit court; the assessment mission's interlocutors stressed the critical linkage between public defenders and effective policing. Cases are processed with significant delays, if they are processed at all, while oversight and accountability of rule of law institutions are limited.

41. Prisons are operational in all counties except Grand Kru, though only the prisons in Monrovia and Zwedru are secured by armed personnel, from the Police Support Unit. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which comprises 496 personnel, including 111 women, is unarmed. Pretrial detainees account for 63 per cent of the national prison population; many of those detainees languish in overcrowded prisons.

Humanitarian situation

42. When the Government of Côte d'Ivoire closed the border as a preventive measure during the Ebola outbreak in August 2014, an estimated 38,000 Ivorian refugees remained in Liberia. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resumed the facilitation of voluntary repatriation on 18 December 2015, through humanitarian corridors. The process was suspended in September 2016 until the end of the rainy season, due to poor road conditions. UNHCR plans to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of 25,000 refugees by the end of 2016; as at 1 November 2016, 19,426 refugees were repatriated. Those refugees wishing to remain in Liberia will be locally integrated. Most refugees have expressed their intention to return home but have also expressed concerns about security in areas of return, lack of access to basic services and fear of foreigners occupying their land. Given the physical protection provided by the UNOCI force for the return process, the drawdown of the UNOCI troops has had an impact on

perceptions about safety. The Ivorian authorities have been making efforts to encourage refugees to return, including a visit to refugee camps in Liberia by the Minister of Solidarity, Social Cohesion and Victim Compensation of Côte d'Ivoire in May 2016.

43. Prior to the Ebola outbreak, humanitarian response had been transitioning to a development agenda. There has since been limited donor support for post-Ebola recovery, including for rebuilding the devastated health sector or protecting survivors. Human development indicators remain low due to limited livelihood opportunities, youth unemployment, female vulnerability, demographic expansion and food insecurity. Access to basic services is limited, particularly in rural areas. Consequently, Liberian households have little resilience.

44. Disaster risk reduction strategies could have a preventive impact. The national disaster management agency of Liberia, established in July 2016 for disaster preparedness and response, will require external support to execute its mandate. In 2016, the World Bank approved a $10 million grant to improve social safety nets.

Border assessment and regional issues

45. The Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border area has remained stable since the assessment conducted in February 2016, details of which are provided in my special report on UNOCI (S/2016/297), subsequent to which UNMIL troops were withdrawn from the border. On 8 September 2016, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire reopened the border, which had been closed since August 2014 due to the Ebola outbreak.

46. The Liberia National Police and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization have increased their presence in the border area and, together with local government authorities, have effectively managed border-related challenges such as conflict between communities and foreign farmers illegally encroaching on land in Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties. However, insufficient personnel, logistics and mobility continue to present challenges. The Armed Forces of Liberia deployed a small detachment to Zwedru but is not involved in routine border management or security operations.

47. Past claims regarding the presence of former Ivorian combatants in border areas have been overstated, though some estimate that 2,000 of those combatants could be present in Liberia, which could have an impact on perceptions about stability. The security environment is also affected by distrust between communities and security forces in south-western Côte d'Ivoire. However, those challenges are localized and pose no direct threat to Liberia's stability.

48. A quadripartite meeting bringing together the commanders of the Liberian and Ivorian armies with the force commanders of UNMIL and UNOCI was held in Grand Bassam in March 2016; since then, the two missions have been supporting the development of a joint operations plan for common border security exercises. While there are plans to initiate joint operations before the Ivorian legislative elections, operations could be affected by poor roads in the south-east of Liberia and resource constraints facing Liberian security personnel.

49. The United Nations system is also supporting various initiatives focused on enhancing conditions in the border area. These are aimed at improving food

security, livelihoods, physical security, cross-border social cohesion, border surveillance and security service delivery and at increasing public confidence in security providers.

50. Liberia does not face any threat from its neighbouring countries; it is considered improbable that the dynamics within Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea or Sierra Leone will have an impact on Liberia's stability. UNOCI and UNMIL continue to support the reactivation of joint border security and confidence-building units, a component of the strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union bringing together actors from security, administration and civil society. Despite inadequate investment from member States, these units have achieved considerable success, including by facilitating communication and coordination throughout the Ebola outbreak. With political and financial support, the planned 22 units along the borders of the Mano River Union countries could play a significant role in diffusing tension and addressing threats.

B. Recommendations of the strategic assessment

51. Notwithstanding the prevailing stability and the considerable progress made by national security institutions, a continued period of testing national capacity to maintain stability independently of the peacekeeping operation would be important, particularly in the context of the 2017 elections. Liberia should therefore remain on the Security Council's agenda under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations until 30 June 2018, with a United Nations mission implementing a mandate focused on the tasks most essential for consolidating peace, specifically: (a) good offices and political support; (b) in extremis logistical support for the 2017 elections; (c) human rights; (d) security sector reform; (e) support for the rule of law; and (f) in extremis support for Liberian security agencies in protecting civilians.

52. To enhance mutual accountability between the Government and the international community, UNMIL, working closely with other partners, should elaborate a compact detailing shared expectations on which future support will be conditioned.

53. My Special Representative will focus on conflict prevention in the context of the electoral process and through the democratic transition, while continuing to facilitate nationally owned processes such as national reconciliation and constitutional and institutional reforms and addressing political blockages to human rights and governance reforms, particularly with respect to land and governance. An essential element of political support would be promoting more effective communication between the Government and the people of Liberia; UNMIL Radio, which reaches all 15 counties in the country and 90 per cent of the population, has a critical role to play in that regard.

54. Within existing capabilities, the Mission could be mandated to fill, only on an emergency basis, elections-related logistical gaps, particularly with respect to accessing remote areas. Such in extremis assistance should not be factored into national plans for conducting the elections.

55. The United Nations should retain a strong human rights presence focused on supporting the national reconciliation process, a critical component of which must be accountability for past and current human rights violations and abuses while engaging in monitoring, reporting and early warning activities, particularly in the electoral context. It would also be important to support the development of national capacity to promote, protect and advocate human rights, with an emphasis on ensuring human rights compliance within the security sector; preventative, punitive and protective measures to address sexual and gender-based violence; addressing harmful traditional practices; and enhancing the protection of children.

56. With respect to security sector reform, the United Nations should prioritize good offices and strategic advice, with an emphasis on areas that are not advancing due to political blockages. The Mission should provide strategic-level mentoring of the national security services, including in their electoral security planning and preparations, and should support the Government in priority areas such as reviewing the national security strategy, decentralizing security services, establishing oversight and accountability mechanisms, updating the public expenditure review, tracking small arms and light weapons and bringing about public safety reform.

57. The Mission should also prioritize good offices and strategic engagement in its support for rule of law, focusing on working with national stakeholders to develop and implement strategic reform plans and policies, on enhancing national oversight and accountability mechanisms, including anti-corruption efforts, and on addressing prolonged pretrial detention, advancing critical reform legislation and addressing election-related litigation.

58. With the assumption by the Government of full responsibility for security as at 30 June 2016, the operational security role of UNMIL or its successor should remain in extremis support for Liberian security agencies in protecting civilians in the event of a deterioration that could risk a strategic reversal of stability in the country, taking into account its capabilities and areas of deployment.

59. Consistent with the recommendations of the strategic review of Côte d'Ivoire conducted in February 2016, the two missions and respective United Nations country teams, in collaboration with regional partners, should continue their inter-mission cooperation and facilitation of bilateral cooperation with respect to border stabilization, which should be handed over to national and regional stakeholders, with the missions playing an advisory role for the duration of their respective deployments.

III. Proposed adjustments to the United Nations Mission in Liberia

60. All of the assessment mission's interlocutors agreed that it is inevitable that UNMIL should withdraw; however, there were divergent views regarding timing. Most interlocutors, including the President, were of the view that the Mission provides a security guarantee and has a deterrent effect that would be essential during the electoral period and provides a moral authority that would bring legitimacy to the electoral outcomes. Others were adamant that the presence of UNMIL undermines confidence in the ability of national institutions to perform

their responsibilities of protecting the population and ensuring security in the country, while providing a disincentive for sustained national efforts in critical areas, and that therefore the Mission should depart.

A. Current configuration of the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Military component

61. UNMIL has been progressively drawing down since 2006, reducing the authorized strength of its military personnel from the peak of 15,250, to the current strength of 1,240 by 30 June 2016. The Force, which is consolidated in Monrovia, comprises one battalion (700 troops) and related enablers, specifically, five military helicopters (160 personnel), a level II plus hospital (87 personnel), transport (44 personnel), engineers (80 personnel) and a support company (55 personnel), in addition to 14 military police, 40 staff officers and 60 military observers.

Quick reaction force

62. The quick reaction force established in UNOCI pursuant to Security Council resolution 2162 (2014) will continue to provide over-the-horizon support for Liberia, including after its transfer to MINUSMA, in keeping with Council resolution 2295 (2016). Under all options, the unit would deploy to Liberia in situations risking a strategic reversal of stability, in support of the front-line response of Liberian security institutions. The Mission would retain a Force Commander to assume operational control of the quick reaction force if deployed in Liberia, as well as sufficient mission support capacity to ensure its effective deployment and operations.

63. The unit will be repatriated from UNOCI in February 2017. An advance component of 250 personnel comprising a mechanized company with command and support elements will deploy to MINUSMA by February 2017, while the remainder of the unit, including helicopters, will be refitted and retrained in Senegal before deployment to MINUSMA in May 2017. Only the advance component will be available for operations in Liberia between March and August 2017.

Police component

64. The police component of UNMIL has been progressively drawing down, from its peak authorized strength of 1,795 to its current authorized strength of 606 personnel, including 226 individual police and immigration officers and 380 officers in three formed police units deployed to Monrovia, Gbarnga and Zwedru.

Civilian component

65. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/278, UNMIL has 1,011 civilian posts, including 560 national, 294 international and 157 United Nations Volunteer posts. Under all options, the civilian component would be aligned with the mandate recommended in paragraphs 51 to 59 above.

B. Options for adjusting the United Nations Mission in Liberia

66. Taking into account the views of stakeholders, the prevailing security situation and capacity of national institutions to maintain stability and the forthcoming electoral period, the assessment mission considered three options as viable. Any adjustment should take into account the need to preserve the gains made during the 13 years of UNMIL deployment. The options presented below are therefore proposed with respect to the armed component of UNMIL. As a mitigation measure in the event of a deterioration risking a strategic reversal of stability, any of the options would benefit from security support in the context of inter-mission cooperation, including the quick reaction force.

Option 1. Withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia and establishment of a successor peacekeeping mission

67. Given the prevailing stability and the developing capacity of national security institutions to maintain stability, the closure of UNMIL and the establishment of a successor mission that would continue to support the Government of Liberia in consolidating peace would be possible, with the above-specified substantive mandate. Military and police advisory capacity would be required for mentoring national counterparts and to serve as headquarters in the event of a temporary deployment of uniformed personnel from other peacekeeping missions. The proposed authorized strength of the UNMIL force and police as at 31 March 2017 would be 21 and 100, respectively.

68. The timelines for implementing this option would be short, as it should be effected in early 2017 to ensure that the successor is operational before the elections. Proceeding with this option would carry the risk of causing a disruption during a sensitive political period; moreover, it is not assured that such a successor would generate the same confidence associated with the brand UNMIL, which would be retained under options 2 and 3 below.

Option 2. Status quo

69. According to option 2, the armed components of UNMIL would remain at the current authorized strength of 1,240 and 606 military and police personnel, respectively, while the civilian component would be refined to reflect the above-specified substantive mandate.

70. Option 2 would leave the most robust in extremis security response capability and would be the least disruptive option. However, it would carry the risk identified by interlocutors of undermining confidence in the ability of national institutions to perform their sovereign responsibilities of protecting the population and ensuring security in the country.

Option 3. Drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Liberia

71. Taking into account the absence of a military threat, the withdrawal of the battalion and related enablers by March 2017 would be possible, leaving 28 military personnel, specifically 14 advisers and 14 military observers. Commercial alternatives would be identified to compensate for the withdrawal of military

enablers, particularly aviation and medical capacity. UNMIL would retain in-country capacity to respond in extremis to public disorder, specifically two formed police units consolidated in Monrovia as at April 2017, requiring improved mobility and capacities. These units would provide deterrence, standby support for national security institutions during the election period, protect United Nations personnel and facilities and help consolidate the progress and investment in Liberia's security institutions. The number of the individual police and immigration officers would progressively decrease, reaching 100 by March 2017 and 80 by January 2018, and would remain at 80 until UNMIL closes in June 2018. The focus would be on mentoring and providing advisory support to the middle and senior management of the national police and other law enforcement services. The proposed authorized strength of the UNMIL force and police as at 31 March 2017 would be 28 and 360, respectively.

72. Proceeding with this option would minimize the risk of a disruption during the sensitive political period, taking into account remaining law and order challenges and the persistent causes of conflict. It would also ensure effective good offices during the elections and the subsequent democratic handover.

Support implications

73. Due to the poor infrastructure in Liberia, including a road network that becomes impassable during the annual rainy season, there has been heavy reliance on the UNMIL military enablers, much of which have been withdrawn during drawdown. To enhance the local economy and prepare for downsizing, commercial options will be optimized.

74. By March 2017, the field presence of UNMIL will be consolidated to Voinjama and Zwedru, which are recommended to be retained under all the options. However, UNMIL still reflects the legacy of a once-large peacekeeping operation, and the support-related challenges to its closure will be significant. There are still 27 sites that require services and resources. Sites are closed in accordance with United Nations environmental standards, with clearance from the Government. Given the complexity and number of the sites, the closure process will require sufficient time to ensure that the highest environmental standards are met.

75. As its field presence is reduced, UNMIL and the Government have made arrangements to ensure continuous provision of UNMIL Radio. This includes the gifting of towers to the Government on the understanding that UNMIL Radio could continue to use them, with the Government providing power and security, an arrangement that is in place in several locations.

Safety and security of personnel

76. With the conclusion of the security transition, primary responsibility for the protection of United Nations personnel and installations in Liberia was transferred to the Government. The capacity shortfalls of the national security institutions do not constitute a specific threat, but are rather constraints to consider when planning United Nations activities and programmes, which in the future should take into account areas where national security personnel are scarce or non-existent.

Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

77. Between July 2015 and June 2016, 5,042 UNMIL personnel, including 3,291 contingent personnel, were trained in my zero tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse. Regular field visits were undertaken to ensure that personnel and communities are aware of the standards of conduct expected of United Nations personnel, procedures for reporting misconduct, and disciplinary measures. UNMIL also developed a community-based response and complaints mechanism. My Special Representative issued a new standard operating procedure for reporting misconduct on 1 October 2016. There has been one allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse in 2016.

IV. Future of the United Nations in Liberia

78. Any decision on the future of the United Nations engagement in Liberia beyond June 2018 is recommended to be deferred pending an assessment to be conducted in consultation with the next government. In the meantime, efforts are under way to enhance and intensify planning involving UNMIL and the United Nations country team, in consultation with the Government, to facilitate a smooth transition of the United Nations engagement in Liberia. Essential for the success of the transition process is active Government involvement and continued communication with the population.

79. The United Nations country team will conduct a capacity mapping to identify the expertise and resources required to address priorities that will remain after the withdrawal of UNMIL. UNMIL and the United Nations country team have established a transition planning group that will develop and implement a concrete and time-bound plan for the United Nations transition in Liberia, in keeping with the sustaining peace framework outlined in Security Council resolution 2282 (2016), with an objective of fully leveraging the capacities of the United Nations system. The Peacebuilding Commission should be actively engaged, and a transition package from the Peacebuilding Fund could be formulated to assist. Engaging the country team in the mandated tasks of UNMIL, supported by the Mission's budget, is being pursued in keeping with the recommendations of the high-level panel on peace operations (S/2015/446) and my response (S/2015/682), and will be expanded.

80. After the withdrawal of the United Nations mission, the United Nations will continue to address residual peacebuilding challenges through the United Nations country team in line with an agreed peace consolidation plan consistent with the mandates of the respective agencies, funds and programmes, and within the limits of available resources. A $16.8 million joint programme on the rule of law, justice and security, signed in October 2016, leveraging the comparative strengths of UNDP and UNMIL, will facilitate the timely transition of jointly identified priorities to the country team.

V. Financial implications

81. The General Assembly, in its resolution 70/278, appropriated $187.1 million for the maintenance of UNMIL for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNMIL beyond 31 December 2016, the cost for maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

82. As at 28 October 2016, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNMIL amounted to $41.3 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $2,154.6 million.

83. Reimbursement of troop/formed police costs has been made for the period up to 31 July 2016, while partial reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 June 2016, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VI. Observations

84. Just over 13 years ago, an agreement was signed in Accra that helped to bring lasting peace to Liberia. Since then, the country has undergone a significant transformation and is on the path to sustained stability, as a result of the determination of the people and the Government of Liberia, with support from regional and international partners. Once a failed State and the epicentre of violence and conflict in the region, Liberia has built new institutions based on democratic principles and the rule of law. It also overcame the Ebola outbreak in 2014, which threatened to reverse gains made since the end of the civil war. I wish to salute the steadfast determination and commitment of the people and the Government of Liberia to consolidating the hard-won peace.

85. However, Liberia remains fragile. The complex nature and magnitude of the challenges inherited from the civil war and the dysfunctional pre-war State will pose serious long-term obstacles for reconciling a divided population and building essential national institutions, particularly in the security and rule of law sectors. As a consequence, the country will require support for the foreseeable future from its bilateral and other partners.

86. President Johnson Sirleaf has articulated an ambitious reform agenda aimed at transforming Liberian state and society. However, as I have observed over the past several years, the gains made will remain vulnerable to reversal as long as the sociopolitical underpinnings of governance have not found common understanding among all Liberians. Building credible and effective institutions, particularly in the security and rule of law sectors, requires progress in overcoming the root causes of conflict. It will take political will, determination and courage to prioritize the future of the country, build a shared sense of nation, enhance governance and ensure the inclusion and rights of all citizens, which are essential if lasting peace and sustainable development are to take root.

87. A meaningful and comprehensive national reconciliation process must be at the centre of a continued, long-term peace process. All Liberian citizens, including civil society, political parties and religious, traditional and political leaders, should

be engaged in a serious process of addressing divisive issues that contributed to past conflict and ensuring that there is timely accountability for impunity. I call on the Government of Liberia to demonstrate to its citizens that reconciliation is a national priority, by articulating and actively pursuing a vision for reconciliation and by putting some of its limited financial resources into reconciliation efforts. I further call on the Government to empower the institutions it has established to strengthen the democratic dispensation and improve fraught state-society relations, including commissions advancing, among other things, human rights, land reform, law reform, governance and anti-corruption efforts. Equally essential is the timely adoption and implementation of critical reform legislation, and citizen engagement in the reform process.

88. Liberia reached a historic milestone on its path to lasting peace on 30 June, when the Government fully assumed its sovereign responsibilities for protecting its population and securing its territory. Since the conclusion of the security transition, there has not been a single incident requiring an armed intervention from UNMIL, a powerful demonstration that the country has turned the corner from instability and dependency and is on the path of sustained stability. I welcome the Government's commitment to professionalizing its security institutions. I further welcome the determination of national security personnel, all of whom expressed confidence in their ability to perform their responsibilities, provided that logistics and other operational support is forthcoming from the Government. It is essential to communicate this significant achievement to the people of Liberia, to build their confidence in their national institutions.

89. At the same time, it is critical that the efforts made in the security sector be complemented by commensurate efforts to develop credible and functioning judicial and corrections systems, which are lagging behind. The Government and its partners should invest more resources in reforming the justice system, expanding its accessibility, strengthening oversight and ridding it of corruption and archaic and discriminatory laws.

90. I am encouraged by the good neighbourliness and security cooperation fostered in the context of ECOWAS and the Mano River Union, and I call for continued efforts in that regard. Such partnerships have been essential in resolving the Liberian conflict and should be leveraged to consolidate peace.

91. Next year's election — Liberia's first truly democratic transition — will be historic. I have full confidence in the ability of the National Elections Commission to conduct these elections, which is well advanced in its preparations. All political actors and their constituents should engage actively and constructively in the democratic process, while refraining from inflammatory rhetoric. It would be important to learn lessons from the 2011 electoral process, which was accompanied by controversy in the absence of national healing, by taking forward over the course of the next year reforms that would enhance perceptions about the legitimacy, transparency, fairness and inclusiveness of elections. I would call upon Liberia's partners to provide critical assistance by deploying observers throughout the electoral process, and I would also call upon the Government to maximize the time before the elections to advance national reconciliation and reform processes. Freedom of political and civic expression are paramount to a credible electoral process and, in that regard, I would underscore the essential role in a democratic

society of empowered opposition parties and a free media, which allow all Liberian citizens to have a meaningful stake in the political, social and institutional life of the country.

92. The year 2017 will be critical for consolidating Liberia's hard-won peace, the sustainability of which will be demonstrated with the handover of presidential power in early 2018. Notwithstanding the prevailing stability and good progress made by national security institutions, it is essential that Liberia remain on the Security Council's agenda under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, at least through 30 June 2018. I therefore recommend, in line with the findings of the strategic assessment, that the Council approve the presence of a United Nations mission reflecting the priorities identified in paragraphs 51 to 59 above and consider the options put forward in paragraphs 67 to 72 above. It is important to preserve the legacy of all that has been achieved during the 13 years of UNMIL deployment.

93. Once the next Government is installed in 2018, a further strategic assessment would finalize recommendations for the future of the United Nations engagement in Liberia, based on continuous joint transition planning through 2017, assessments of the situation in the country and the priorities of the new Government. I take seriously calls for enhanced mutual accountability between the Government and the international community, and I will therefore prioritize the elaboration of a compact detailing shared expectations on which future support will be conditioned.

94. We are working to reimagine the role of the United Nations in Liberia and will continue working closely with regional and other stakeholders in this regard. The continued support of the African Union and ECOWAS in complementing the work of the United Nations remains essential.

95. I am enormously proud of the role played by UNMIL in facilitating peace in Liberia, and I would like to thank my Special Representative, Farid Zarif, for his excellent leadership, all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel who have served with UNMIL over the past 13 years and the United Nations country team colleagues who have worked alongside them. I appreciate the invaluable support of troop- and police-contributing countries, donor countries, regional and multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations. I wish to pay special tribute to ECOWAS, which facilitated the restoration of peace in Liberia and the achievements of UNMIL, without which the country might not now be entering its final peacekeeping phase.

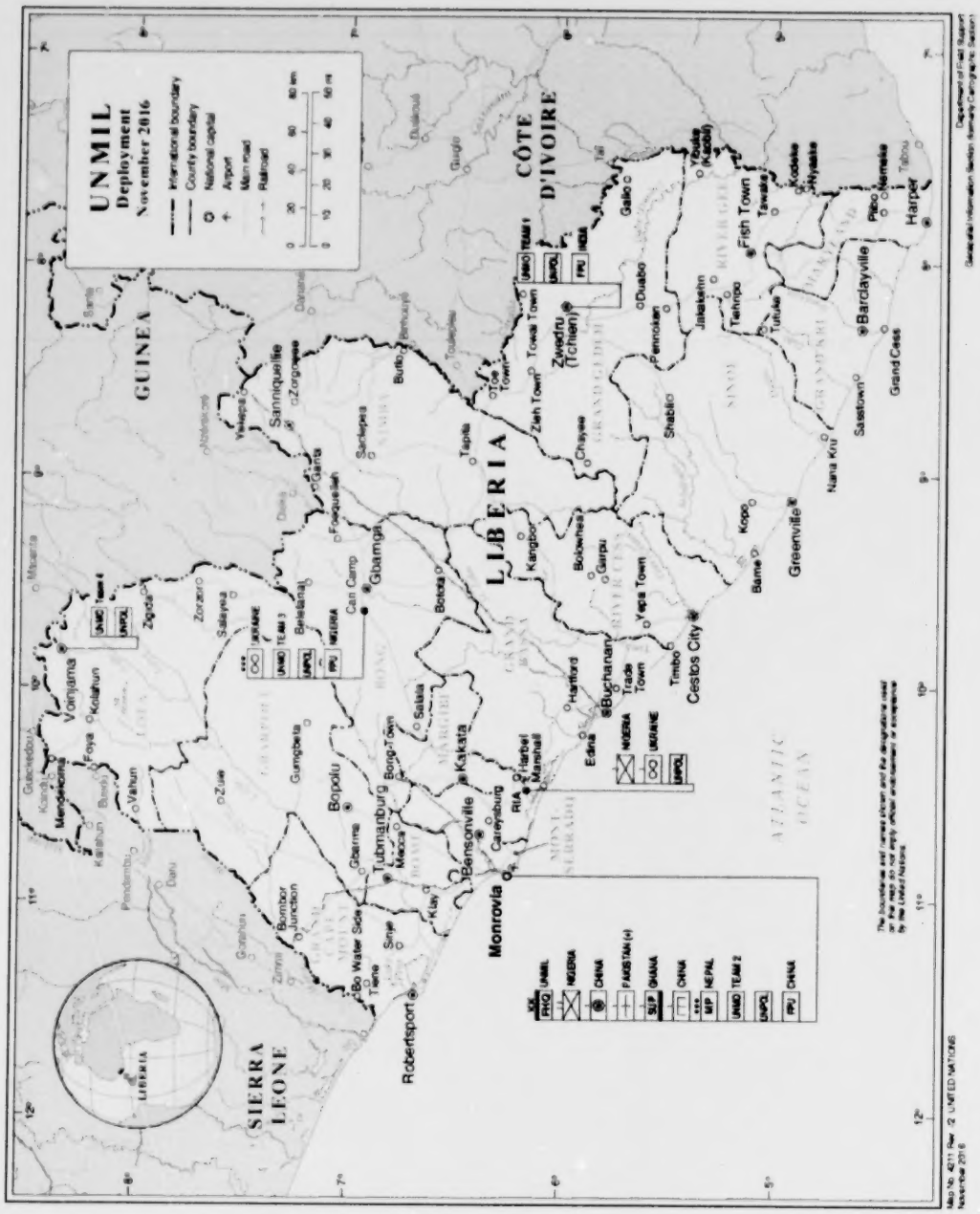
Annex

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and police strength as at 1 November 2016

	Military component					
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officers*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Formed police units*	*Police officers*
Bangladesh	3	4	–	7		4
Benin	1	1	–	2		–
Bhutan	–	–	–	–		3
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1	–	–	1		–
Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	–	–		1
Brazil	1	1	–	2		–
China	1	3	124	128	140	4
Egypt	5	–	–	5		–
Ethiopia	3	2	–	5		–
Gambia	3	–	–	3		14
Germany	–	–	–	–		3
Ghana	7	4	55	66		25
India	–	–	–	–	121	7
Jordan	–	–	–	–		1
Kenya	–	–	–	–		13
Kyrgyzstan	–	–	–	–		2
Malaysia	1	1	–	2		–
Namibia	1	1	–	2		2
Nepal	2	2	16	20		5
Niger	2	–	–	2		–
Nigeria	9	4	698	711	119	15
Norway	–	–	–	–		3
Pakistan	4	6	88	98		–
Poland	–	–	–	–		3
Republic of Korea	–	–	–	–		6
Romania	–	–	–	–		1
Russian Federation	2	–	–	2		–
Serbia	1	–	–	1		–
Sri Lanka	–	–	–	–		4
Sweden	–	–	–	–		7
Switzerland	–	–	–	–		2
Togo	1	1	–	2		–
Turkey	–	–	–	–		2

Country	Military component				Formed police units	Police officers
	Military observers	Staff officers	Troops	Total		
Uganda	–	–	–	–		2
Ukraine	3	2	160	165		5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	–	–	–	–		2
United States of America	2	4	–	6		–
Yemen	–	–	–	–		1
Zambia	1	–	–	1		14
Zimbabwe	1	–	–	1		11
Total	**55**	**34**	**160**	**22**	**380**	**162**

Map


UNMIL
Deployment
November 2016
International boundary
County boundary
National capital
Airport
Main road
Railroad
LIBERIA
GUINEA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
SIERRA LEONE
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Monrovia
Robertsport
Bo Waterside
Bomber Junction
Tubmanburg
Bopolu
Gbarnga
Kakata
Bensonville
Careysburg
RIA
Harbel
Marshall
Buchanan
Harper
Barclayville
Fish Town
Greenville
Sasstown
Grand Cess
Nana Kru
Kpoo
Bame
Cestos City
Timbo
Yeya Town
Trade Town
Edina
Harford
Kolahun
Voinjama
Foya
Vahun
Zorzor
Zigida
Salayea
Can Camp
Gbarma
Foquelleh
Sanniquellie
Zorgowee
Ganta
Saclepea
Tapita
Kangbo
Bolahun
Gompa
Chayeo
Zwedru (Tchien)
Zleh Town
Towia Town
Tai Town
Gbeapo
Duabo
Jinkeinn
Tienpo
Tuluka
Pleebo
Harmaka
Kodeke
Hyeaka
Shabbo
Bopolu
Gumbeta
Salala
Borg-Town
Klay
Singe
Tiene
Zimmi
Gbahlon
Zuie
Bolahun
Pendembu
Gbedebdou
Mendekoma
Kamatahun
Kondabu
Mobaria
Barlo
Bahn
Daniel
Bolloh
Toudeou
Bugio
Bahnzayee
Butuo
Yekepa
Abbeloud
Diang
Foya
Kolahun
Vahun
Zigida
Zorzor
Salayea
Can Camp
Gbarnga
Foquelleh
Sanniquellie
Zorgowee
Ganta
Saclepea
Tapita
Kangbo
Bolahun
Gompa
Chayeo
Zwedru (Tchien)
Zleh Town
Towia Town
Tai Town
Gbeapo
Duabo
Jinkeinn
Tienpo
Tuluka
Pleebo
Harmaka
Kodeke
Hyeaka
Shabbo
Bopolu
Gumbeta
Salala
Borg-Town
Klay
Singe
Tiene
Zimmi
Gbahlon
Zuie
Bolahun
Pendembu
Gbedebdou
Mendekoma
Kamatahun
Kondabu
Mobaria
Barlo
Bahn
Daniel
Bolloh
Toudeou
Bugio
Bahnzayee
Butuo
Yekepa
Abbeloud
Diang
Foya
Kolahun
Vahun
Zigida
Zorzor
Salayea
Can Camp
Gbarnga
Foquelleh
Sanniquellie
Zorgowee
Ganta
Saclepea
Tapita
Kangbo
Bolahun
Gompa
Chayeo
Zwedru (Tchien)
Zleh Town
Towia Town
Tai Town
Gbeapo
Duabo
Jinkeinn
Tienpo
Tuluka
Pleebo
Harmaka
Kodeke
Hyeaka
Shabbo
Bopolu
Gumbeta
Salala
Borg-Town
Klay
Singe
Tiene
Zimmi
Gbahlon
Zuie
Bolahun
Pendembu
Gbedebdou
Mendekoma
Kamatahun
Kondabu
Mobaria
Barlo
Bahn
Daniel
Bolloh
Toudeou
Bugio
Bahnzayee
Butuo
Yekepa
Abbeloud
Diang